

Paris Revisited.

"On ne rêve pas toujours."
"Comme on rêve à vingt ans."

In view of the fact that our indefatigable editor informs me that we are to hold a Nursing Conference in Paris next year (a modest edition of the great Berlin Congress), I thought perhaps it might interest the readers of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING if I jotted down a few impressions of Paris which I received when I revisited the town of St. Geneviève the other day after 27 years' absence. Twenty-seven years ago I spent two of the most impressionable years of my life there, and various circumstances made them also two of the most important, and though a lifetime has passed since then, all my recollections were as vivid as when I first left. For the lover of Paris loves her always. She has carried the mantle of romance into modern life; every street and every square teems with memories, sinister, terrible, grotesque, or beautiful, but never commonplace. When you think of London, the City, commerce, the Lord Mayor, flat-capped 'prentice lads, Dick Whittington and his speculation in cats at once rise unbidden to your mind; a picture of orderly progress towards a great triumph in respectability and prosperity; the City fathers and the Mansion House legitimately completed by a London County Council and a consolidated water rate—something to respect. But Paris! Paris is history, romance and fable, fearful and beautiful—none the less fascinating because, like Vesuvius, terrible possibilities lie hidden beneath her tranquil daily routine. Paris is the living memory of gorgeous, dissolute courts that were the envy and model of Europe, of artistic refinement carried to its highest pitch, of great monarchs and great conquerors round whose name clings an eternal glamour. Paris is the town that has ever argued with her rulers by the ready barricade, the frequent revolt, whose frenzied passion for that goddess "that never was on earth, in sky, or sea," Liberty, has led to fierce Jacques in the middle ages, to Frondes, to '93 and the insane commune of '70. Paris is the town in which the tocsin sounded for that most awful outbreak of religious fanaticism on St. Bartholomew's night, and that two centuries later abolished God and substituted the goddess of Reason. And the beautiful city of many moods—for centuries the playground and fashion plate of Europe—still retains its hold on the imagination of the world, although shorn of much of its old splendour.

I went to Paris in charge of a sister (private, not official), who speaks adorable French. She knows the psychological moment at which to say "si, si," when to tip the humble two sous and when the lordly franc, she can smile on the chambermaid in her own tongue so that the hot water arrives at once. She has no false pride and will go to a theatre box-office and demand cheap seats "where one can see," and last, but not least, she can decipher the cryptograms of a continental Bradshaw and conduct you safely by its aid to your destination. It was, therefore (for me), a trip singularly free from all care.

Travelling via Southampton and Havre we passed through beautiful country and Rouen, the grand old capital of our Norman kings, that has made and seen so much history. Do any of you recollect a gruesome French picture exhibited at one of the Bond Street galleries some years ago? I forget the painter's name, but it represented Henry V.'s winter siege of Rouen, and the "useless mouths" that had been turned out of the beleaguered town, and were starving between the city walls and the English lines that would not let them past. Nothing but that terrible realistic scene would come into my head, as I admired the beautiful spring landscape smiling round the beautiful old town; truth, but the roots of beauty and success often spring from a muddy soil.

We did not see Paris in the ordinary sense of the word, that is to say, we did not arrange Day I., Day II., and so forth, so many days, so many sights. No, from the time we arrived at the very hideous Gare St. Lazare to the time we re-embarked at that same dingy and noisy counterpart of Waterloo Station, we simply tramped and dawdled the streets, visiting old haunts, taking a chance 'bus, tram or steamer, turning into a church or gallery we happened to pass, and generally receiving impressions in that idle frame of mind, which, I hold, is the only true way to enjoy a foreign holiday.

The first impression I received was that, externally, at all events, Paris has not improved under the fostering care of Madame La Republique. Everything seemed in want of paint and cleaning; looked dingy and, with the exception of the gardens, ill-kept. Was the Rue de Rivoli always so dirty, its shops always so full of the veriest trumpery? Were the Magasins du Louvre always so crowded, so pushing, so badly served, so filled with rubbish? Were the streets always so muddy and unswept, so absolutely crowded with English and American tourists? And the dainty little river steamers *Les Hirondelles*, in which I had so delighted, had they always been so terribly in

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